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Taxonomic comment on southeastern representatives of two wide-ranging African cisticolas

by P. A. Clancey

Received 1 November 1991

Conclusions arrived at from studies of material in southern African collections of southeastern populations of two wide-ranging Afrotropical cisticolas, namely the Pale-crowned or Pectoral-patch Cisticola (Sibley & Monroe 1990) *Cisticola brunnescens* and the Rattling Cisticola *C. chiniana*, are presented hereunder. In both instances new subspecific taxa are introduced.

***Cisticola brunnescens* Heuglin, 1862**

Such material as is available reveals that two forms of cloudscraper cisticola of *C. brunnescens*-type occur along the southeastern littoral of the Southern African Subregion between the eastern Transkei and the Limpopo R. flood-plain of southern Mozambique. One of these corresponds with the southernmost of the two subspecies of *brunnescens* currently recognised from regions lying to the south of the Zambezi, namely, *C. b. egregius* (Roberts), 1913; Wakkerstroom, southeastern Transvaal, whereas the second is undescribed. Structurally this innominate form does not differ from *C. brunnescens*, but is somewhat smaller than *egregius*, in addition to being markedly darker in colour and strikingly streaked with black dorsally. As both have been collected alongside one another during the southern winter months, as at Fossil Head Reserve, eastern Transkei, and again on the Limpopo flood-plain, the possibility that discrete sibling species rather than conspecifics are involved in this instance requires to be addressed.

Firstly, only birds of *egregius*-type are known from the breeding grounds of *C. b. egregius* on the plateau of the Transvaal and upper Natal and the lowlands of Mozambique to the east at the same time, while those of the innominate form are entirely coastal and of seemingly sedentary disposition. Maclean (1985) has, however, drawn attention to the fact that in the grasslands of the Natal midlands (elevations not given), the Pale-crowned Cisticola is "a summer breeding visitor only", yet the Durban Natural Science Museum collection has a specimen dated 11 July from

near Mooi River, in the Natal midlands, at *c.* 4500 ft a.s.l., this of *egregius*-type. Analogous phenotypes, some with comparable dates, both from interior Transvaal and coastal localities are as follows: "Devils Knuckles" and "Krantzview", Barberton (13 and 29 May), Belfast, Wakkerstroom and Volksrust, and on the lowlands to the east at Incoluane (25°04'S, 32°56'E) (3 May), this particular specimen with an inordinately long tail of +1.5 mm, and from Chicumbane, Limpopo R., Mozambique (4 June). A coastal specimen taken somewhat later is a ♀ from Fossil Head Reserve, Transkei (4 August).

In the dark, blackish dorsally striated innominate form, two samples of + ♂♀ specimens from Bangazi North, Lake St Lucia, Zululand (27°39'S, 32°38'E) are dated 10 and 25 July, 1986 and 1987, and two (♂♀) from Msinyeni Pan, Pongola R. 19 July, while two further ♂♂ from near Mtubatuba, Zululand (8 June) are comparable. A still earlier bird is one taken at Redhill, Durban, in April. From further north, the longer series from Chicumbane, Mozambique, comprises three examples of the light interior country phenotype—the dates for the entire series are 2–4 June 1971. Specimens taken later in the year are a ♂ from Fossil Head Reserve, Transkei, dated 1 August, and a moulting ♂ taken on a disused airfield at Stamfordhill, Durban, on 19 September 1961.

The available data support the view that lightly streaked birds breed in the grasslands of the southeastern plateau up to 5000 + ft a.s.l., with some present—presumably migrants—on the littoral to the immediate east from early May through to September. On the other hand, dark birds with heavily streaked upper-parts are seemingly confined to the littoral. The two forms may be collected alongside one another, as at Fossil Head and on the lower Limpopo flood-plain, in which latter locality the Pale-crowned *Cisticola* is by far the commoner of the two small cloudscrapers present in the dry austral winter months, the other being the Fantailed *Cisticola Cisticola juncidis terrestris*.

The *prima facie* impression that two discrete *Cisticola* spp. might be involved was lent a measure of credence by the treatment of *C. brunnescens* in Hall & Moreau's *Atlas of Speciation* (1970), which depicts all recognised subspecies as being forms of more or less moist continental plateaux and highlands, with humid coast seemingly eschewed by the species. These factors notwithstanding, and allowing for the finding of a local tendency to migrate and a much wider level of altitudinal and ecological tolerance on the part of the present *cisticola* than previously established, two races of a single species require to be recognised, one breeding in the grasslands of the southeastern edge of the continental plateau of southeastern Africa and the other along the coast; in this unique. Elements of the interior form spend their off-season within the breeding range of the littoral birds, which, lacking a name, may take the trinomen

***Cisticola brunnescens taciturnus* subsp. nov.**

Type. ♂ adult. Lalapanzi Game Ranch, near Mtubatuba, Zululand, Natal; 8 June 1982. Collected by J. C. Sinclair. In the collection of Durban Natural Science Museum, D. M. Reg. No. 33 847.

Description. In non-breeding dress (May–July) differs from *C. b. egregius* in that the coronal shaft-streaks are much broader and deep black rather than dark brown; hind-neck more streaked with black on a lighter, less rufescent, ground, and mantle and scapulars Ochraceous-Buff rather than Buckthorn Brown (Ridgway 1912), with broader deep black shaft-streaks, the outer vanes of the lateral mantle feathers edged with white, as against light buffy olivaceous in *egregius*; rump Buckthorn Brown rather than Sudan Brown, and more invaded and streaked with fuscous. Underside whiter, with reduced buff wash laterally, and lateral breast surfaces largely immaculate. Wings duller; central rectrices of tail with broader, blacker medial streaks. First primary >12 mm. Size ranging smaller.

In breeding dress, adult male does not assume a blackish wash to the distal face and shows no development of a conspicuous streaked patch on either side of the upper breast. In recent material of *egregius* from the Natal midlands and East Griqualand males show prominent streaked pectoral patches and blackish obfuscation to the lores and distal orbital surfaces.

Measurements (mm). Wings of 7 ♂♂ 48.5–53 (50.4), s.d. 1.56; tails 34–37 (35.4), s.d. 1.09. Wings of 7 ♀♀ 46–48 (47.3), s.d. 0.69; tails of 3 35–37 (36.3). First primaries 12–15 (13.3) mm in 10 measured. Weights: 4 ♂♂ 10–10.8, 3 ♀♀ 8.5–9.5 g.

Measurements of the type. Wing (flattened) 51.5, culmen from base 12, tarsus 23, tail 37 mm.

Material examined. 19—**Transkei:** Fossil Head Reserve, Mzamba; **Natal:** Vernon Crookes Nature Reserve (south coast), Redhill and Stamfordhill, Durban; **Zululand:** Nhlabane (Richards Bay), Mtubatuba district, Mziki (Phinda), Bangazi North (Lake St Lucia), Msinyeni Pan (Pongola R.); **Mozambique:** Manhiça, Chicumbane (Limpopo R. flood-plain).

Range. The coast and immediate interior of southeastern Africa from eastern Transkei, Natal and Zululand to Mozambique as far as the Limpopo R. flood-plain. Birds undertaking high aerial cruises, terminating by plummeting to ground grass-cover, have been observed at Vernon Crookes Nature Reserve, just back from the coast in southern Natal, and breeding birds have recently been obtained at Nhlabane and Mziki, Phinda, in Zululand (15 January and 6 March 1992). A skin in breeding dress (27 September 1955) is also available from Manhiça, Mozambique, at 25°24'S, 32°48'E.

Etymology. From Latin *taciturnus*, silent, in allusion to one of the species' vernacular names, the Silent Cloud Cisticola.

Remarks. Of fundamental zoogeographical import is that in the south of its range *C. brunnescens* is, in the case of the subspecies *C. b. egregius* of the high interior grasslands, allopatrically interposed between two races of the Cloud Cisticola *Cisticola textrix* (Vieillot), 1817, namely *C. t. major* and *C. t. marleyi*, whereas the humid coastal *C. b. taciturnus* is geographically sympatric with *C. t. marleyi* in parts of southern Mozambique and the northeast of Zululand. This points to the possibility that two siblings and not a single unitary species are involved in the two populations currently grouped in *C. brunnescens* to the south of the Limpopo.

The observation made by McLachlan & Liversidge (1970) that in southern Africa *C. brunnescens* in the course of its descent from its aerial cruise "does not give (audible) wing snaps, although it does so elsewhere," may have some bearing on the nature of the issues dealt with in this note.

Wing-lengths (mm) of the other two subspecies of *C. brunnescens* occurring in Africa south of the Zambezi are as follows:

C. b. egregius, 11 ♂♂ 52–55 (53.3), s.d. 1.26; 4 ♀♀ 47.5–49 (48.3). *C. b. cinnamomeus*, 2 ♂♂ 52, 53; 4 ♀♀ 46–47.5 (47.0). *C. b. cinnamomeus* is comparably dark and heavily streaked as in *C. b. taciturnus* but on a redder or more saturated tawny ground. The tawny-buff wash to the breast and lateral surfaces, including the flanks, is also deeper in tone. In size it is similar to *taciturnus*.

Cisticola chiniana (Smith), 1843

The International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature mandated in 1985 that compound generic names terminating in *icola* are in future to be construed as of masculine gender. According to this ruling, the specific name of the Rattling Cisticola, introduced as *Drymoica chiniana* A. Smith, 1843, would, if *chiniana* were viewed as an adjective, have to become *Cisticola chinianus*. The name *chiniana* is, however, not adjectival but seemingly derives from the old Tswana name *Ishwenyane*, formerly used by native peoples for a range of hills near the present town of Zeerust in the western Transvaal (see Cole 1990). In the circumstances, *chiniana* as proposed by Smith is to be treated as a noun in apposition, the binomen of the Rattling Cisticola remaining as *Cisticola chiniana*; cf. Sibley & Monroe (1990).

A re-examination of the geographical variation of this cisticola in southeastern Africa reveals that the dark southern taxa *C. c. chiniana*, the type-locality of which is Zeerust, and *C. c. campestris* (Gould), 1845: Durban, Natal, require to be viewed as centred on the thorn-country of the immediate northern and eastern aspects of the Drakensberg montane system of southeastern Africa. Nominate *chiniana* breeds no further north than the limits of the plateau of the Transvaal, and *C. c. campestris* reaches its range limits in the north on the littoral of Mozambique at c. 22°S.

In sharp contrast to these findings, Irwin (1981), in his seminal *Birds of Zimbabwe*, records that in Zimbabwe *C. c. chiniana* has in the breeding dress the "crown only reddish, the back rather heavily streaked [with blackish brown] and edged with buff or pale brown." The Zimbabwean range is then given as "the Sabi Valley, the south-east lowveld and the Limpopo Valley westwards to the Ramaquabane R." (at 21°33'S, 28°01'E). Adequate recent samples from the Thabazimbi district, Swartruggens, Groot Marico and other localities in the western Transvaal, and topotypical of nominate *C. chiniana*, differ markedly from the referred Zimbabwean population, having the dorsal streaking much heavier, and the coronal and hind-neck surfaces dull vinaceous or purplish-brown with broad dark shaft-streaking, and not bright sandy or ochraceous-rufous, and lack the zoned colour pattern described for

Zimbabwe birds. Series available in Durban show that elements agreeing with those of Zimbabwe in having light rufous head-tops and hind-necks and greyish finely streaked backs extend west to the Thornveld Kalahari of eastern Botswana, where some examples even approach *C. c. frater* Reichenow, 1916: near Windhoek, Namibia, to result in the listing of the latter from southeastern Botswana (see Clancey 1990). This the outcome of a measure of introgression rather than any movement in the Namibian subspecies, *frater*. From the formal taxonomic point of view it is desirable to view *frater* as being a purely Namibian subspecies in future, the southeastern Botswanan population referred to it being incorporated into what is in effect an undescribed taxon, which may be known as

***Cisticola chiniana vulpiniceps* subsp. nov.**

Type. ♂ adult. Humani Ranch, Sabi R. valley, southeastern Zimbabwe, at 20°30'S, 32°16'E; 6 July 1973. Collected by Durban Museum personnel. In the collection of the Durban Natural Science Museum, D.M. Reg. No. 29 235.

Description. Differs from nominate *C. chiniana* in freshly assumed non-breeding dress (May–July) in having the crown and hind-neck less heavily streaked with Sepia, the ground redder (Sudan Brown or more ochreous, *versus* vinaceous Cinnamon-Brown); mantle and scapulars with shaft-streaking finer, the feather-fringes buffier or greyer, less vinaceous. On the underside, starkly whiter over the fore-throat and mid-ventral plane, with reduced buff suffusion over the breast and lateral parts, this latter tending to be greyer or slightly olivaceous. In tail, rectrices more ochraceous, but light terminal spots less rusty tinged. Size ranging smaller (see Table 1).

Material examined. 70—**Botswana:** Molepolole–Letlhakeng road (at Dithejwane Hills, Magagarape Hill and Morobane); **Zimbabwe:** near Bulawayo, Humani Ranch (Sabi R. valley); **southern Mozambique:** Vilanculos, Mapinhane, Panda, Rumbaçaça at 21°47'S, 35°07'E; **eastern Transvaal lowveld:** Malamala Game Ranch, near Newington; **eastern Swaziland:** Big Bend, Lubuli (near Nsoko).

Range. Eastern Botswana south of *C. c. smithersi*; southern, central and eastern Zimbabwe to about 20°30'S in east; southern Mozambique from about the same latitude north of the Save R., south to the Limpopo basin back from the littoral; the eastern bushveld regions of the Transvaal, and the contiguous eastern lowlands of Swaziland to the west of the Lebombo Mtns, south to about the Pongola R. Intergrades with the *C. c. chintiana* from Gaborone south, in southeastern Botswana.

Measurements of the type. Wing (flattened) 62.5, culmen from base 16, tarsus 20, tail 53 mm.

Etymology. *Vulpiniceps*—from Latin *vulpinus*, foxlike, and *caput*, head; that is, having the head-top and hind-neck fox-red in colour.

Remarks. In relatively unworn breeding dress, *C. c. vulpiniceps* has the pileum and hind-neck well-differentiated from the mantle and scapulars, which average lighter and greyer than nominate *chiniana*, the dark shaft-streaking finer. The head and neck retain a reddish nuance.

Irwin (1981) found "birds from most of the central plateau [of Zimbabwe] difficult to place subspecifically as they occupy a position along a multiple cline." In non-breeding dress this population is seemingly less reddish than in *procerus*, but in nuptial plumage dark brown above and indistinctly streaked, in this clearly inclining towards the latter race, which penetrates into northern Zimbabwe as far west as the Kariba basin. Irwin felt that it inclined to the hygric Angolan race *C. c. fortis* Lynes, 1930, but it is here seen as comprising in the main *C. c. vulpiniceps* \leq *procerus* intergrades.

The populations of the Rattling Cisticola present in the Southern African Subregion are viewed as entirely sedentary, but the taking of specimens of as many as three subspecies (*C. c. chiniana*, *C. c. vulpiniceps* and *C. c. smitheresi*) at a single locality during the course of dry season collecting trips, as at Mkien, near Bulawayo, southwestern Zimbabwe, suggests that this may not be so, especially in the case of birds breeding in the desertic parts of the plateau. Samples studied from eastern Zimbabwe and the lowveld of the eastern Transvaal also support the conclusion that elements of some populations are prone to seasonal shifts in the face of the onset of deleterious environmental factors, such as drought and intense southern winter cold. In the south of its range at least, *C. chiniana* is not entirely sedentary. This is, of course, also true of a range of small insectivorous passerines, including other cisticolas, which breed well into the interior of the South West Arid Zone.

With the proposal of the new subspecies *C. c. vulpiniceps* the characters and ranges (Fig. 1) of the contiguous forms may be summarized as follows:

C. c. campestris

Much as in *C. c. chiniana*, but a trifle more olivaceous and less heavily streaked over the upper-parts. Distinguishable in having the underside whiter, the breast, sides and flanks inclining to greyish or dull olivaceous-buff. Similar in size. *Range*: the midlands and coastal regions of Natal, Zululand, and the littoral of Mozambique as far north as 22°S.

C. c. chiniana

Crown to lower back heavily streaked with Sepia, the feathers edged vinaceous Cinnamon-Brown. Underside white, strongly washed with Warm Buff over breast, sides and flanks. Size large (see Table 1). *Range*: the plateau of the Transvaal, generally north of the high-veld, and southeastern Botswana (mainly intergrades towards *vulpiniceps*).

C. c. vulpiniceps

Dorsal streaking as in *campestris*, but ground-colour of vertex and hind-neck rufous or ochraceous-rufous and edging of back feathers buffier (wearing to greyer). Ventral surfaces as in *campestris*. Ranging rather smaller in size (see Table 1). *Range*: as given above.

C. c. procerus

More uniform and redder Cinnamon-Brown dorsally than the previous three, and dark shaft-streaking suppressed. Wings and tail redder and shorter in male (see Table 1); rectrices also broader. In breeding dress wholly darker brown and virtually unstreaked over the upper-parts.

TABLE 1

Wing- and tail-lengths of the four subspecies of *Cisticola chiniana* in the eastern half of southern Africa

Subspecies (south to north)	n	Wing		n	Tail (non-breeding)	
		range	mean, s.d.		range	mean, s.d.
<i>campestris</i> ♂♂ ♀♀	12	63.5-70	65.5, 2.5	6	58-68	61.3, 3.6
	13	50.5-56.5	52.7, 1.8	11	44-53.5	48.0, 3.2
<i>chiniana</i> ♂♂ ♀♀	21	63-70	66.0, 2.3	14	57.5-66	62.0, 2.6
	10	52.5-56.5	54.5, 1.2	7	50.5-54	53.0, 1.4
<i>vulpiniceps</i> ♂♂ ♀♀	12	61-67.5	64.1, 2.4	12	53-62	57.8, 2.9
	10	51-55	53.4, 1.3	10	47-53.5	49.5, 2.2
<i>procerus</i> ♂♂ ♀♀	12	60.5-67	64.5, 2.0	8	50-57	53.5, 2.3
	4	54-57	55.7, 1.3	4	45-51	49.0, 2.7

Notes. The sexual size-differential declines from south to north, and in the case of *C. c. procerus* the tail-length in males drops appreciably compared with the other races, whereas females are scarcely affected. The large standard deviations present in the *C. c. campestris* (a littoral race) tail-length samples are also relevant. Females of nominate *chiniana* average longest tails. Comparable data for the western races *C. c. frater* and *C. c. smithersi* are given in Clancey (1990).

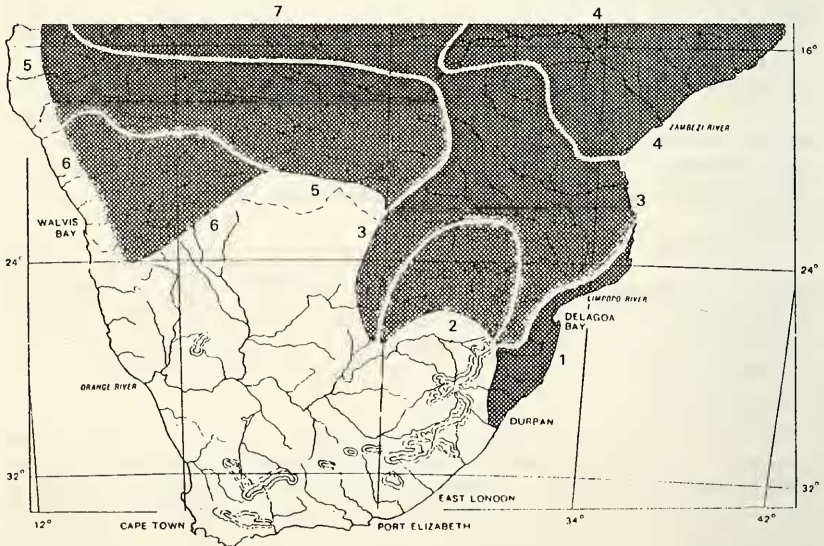


Figure 1. Sketch-map of southern Africa showing the disposition of the subspecies of the Rattling Cisticola: 1, *Cisticola chiniana campestris* (Gould); 2, *Cisticola chiniana chiniana* (Smith); 3, *Cisticola chiniana vulpiniceps* Clancey; 4, *Cisticola chiniana procerus* Peters; 5, *Cisticola chiniana smithersi* Hall; 6, *Cisticola chiniana frater* Reichenow; 7, *Cisticola chiniana bensoni* Traylor and unallocated populations.

Range: Mozambique north from about the Buzi R. (at 20°17'S), northeastern Zimbabwe, west to the Kariba basin, eastern and northeastern Zambia, Malawi, and southeastern Tanzania, south from about Morogoro.

Note. The names *C. c. mocuba* 1933 and *C. c. emendata* 1944, both of Vincent, are synonyms of *C. c. procerus* Peters, 1868: Tete, Mozambique (see White 1960).

Acknowledgements

For the loan of additional material I am indebted to the authorities of the Transvaal Museum, Pretoria (Dr A. C. Kemp). Dr Aldo Berruti, Ornithologist of the Durban Natural Science Museum, also kindly assisted by collecting additional breeding examples of *C. b. taciturnus* in Zululand in January and March 1992.

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A new species of mountain finch *Leucosticte* from western Tibet

by C. S. Roselaar

Received 23 December 1991

When searching for Snow Finches *Montifringilla nivalis*, to be used for the *Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa* (BWP), in a mixed drawer of *Montifringilla* and *Leucosticte* in the collection of the Zoological Museum of Amsterdam (ZMA), I came across two specimens of mountain finch labelled *L. brandti* which did not fully conform to the characters of the other *L. brandti* present. The birds were collected by J. A. Sillem during the Netherlands Karakorum Expedition 1929–1930 on 7 and 8 September 1929 on the plateau between the upper